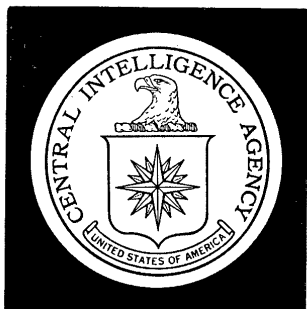




The President's Daily Brief

11 October 1969

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

11 October 1969

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Soviets are professing a renewed interest in helping the Paris peace talks along. *(Page 1)*



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The new travel restrictions in Czechoslovakia will not only close off an escape hatch for harried Czechoslovak liberals, but will also keep foreigners from coming in--at least for the next few months. *(Page 4)*

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VIETNAM

The Soviet Union seems ready to play a role in the Vietnam talks again. Soviet Minister Tcherniakov took the initiative with Ambassador Sullivan on 8 October. He said the USSR was interested in being as "active as ever" in the negotiations, and he asked if there was "any area in the field of military de-escalation" where the Soviets could be helpful.

Tcherniakov promised to seek an answer to Sullivan's question about Hanoi's military intentions. He also suggested that many obstacles in the talks could be surmounted by working through "subordinate" US and Soviet officials, especially in Paris. In closing, Tcherniakov said that it was Moscow's impression that Ho's death had produced a period of "indecision" in Hanoi in which new, long-term policies were still under review. The USSR, he said, wanted to influence the direction of future North Vietnamese decisions.

If Moscow indeed follows through on Tcherniakov's offers, it will be the first significant Soviet initiative regarding Vietnam in months.

Pham Van Dong's recent visit to Moscow could have been the occasion for the formulation of new instructions to the Soviet mission in the US, although we have no hard evidence to this effect.

Assuming the Soviet approach is genuine, it is possible to speculate that Hanoi is preparing to get down to business again in Paris.

Tcherniakov's comment that the North Vietnamese are undecided about how to proceed, and his suggestion that Moscow can influence the regime's future course should not be taken at face value. The North Vietnamese probably have set their immediate course, both in the war and the talks, and have once again rung in the Soviets to sound out US intentions. A

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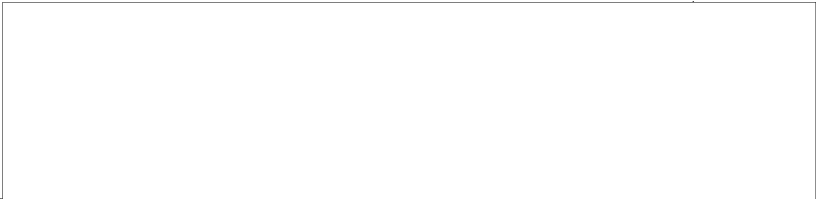
deeper probing of North Vietnamese intentions could lead to the tentative hypothesis that they may have asked the Soviets to bring up military de-escalation on the assumption that this topic is of special interest to the US.

Progress through these circuitous channels would be slow at best, and Tcherniakov probably would come back with only some vague formulation of Hanoi's intentions. Nonetheless, when the Soviets stepped into the picture last year, it almost always could be taken as a sign of seriousness on the part of the Vietnamese Communists. This was most readily apparent in June 1968; only two days after Le Duc Tho passed through Moscow on his first trip to the Paris talks the USSR began playing a much more active part on the sidelines of the negotiations.

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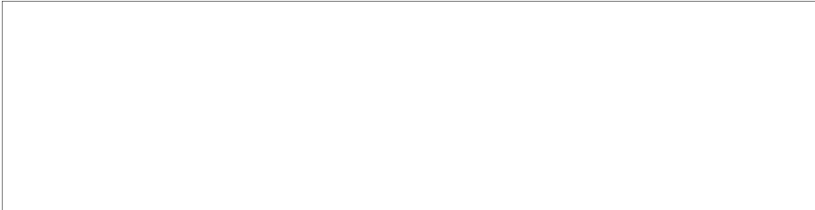
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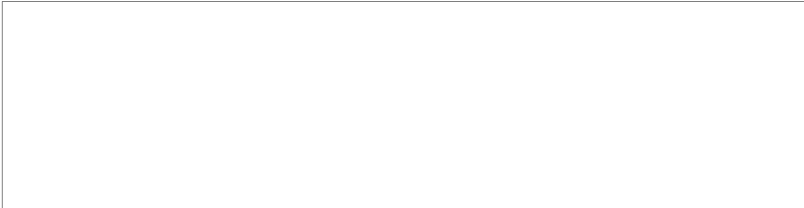
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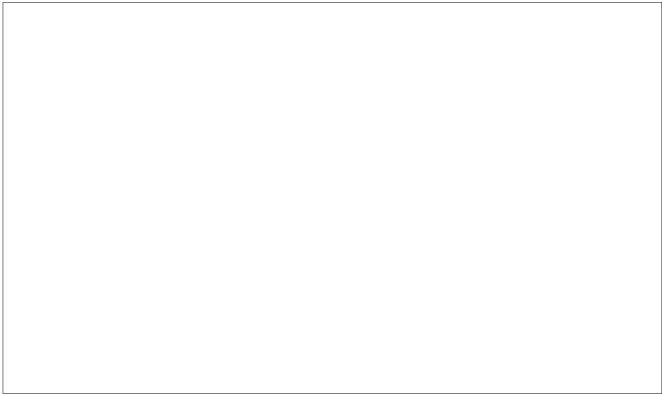
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NOTE

Czechoslovakia: The severe travel restrictions suddenly imposed by the regime have long been pushed by the ultraconservatives. They will close off an escape hatch for liberals fearing retribution for their activities last year and might lead some of them to stop opposing the Husak regime. One little noticed feature of the new regulations is their inclusion of "temporary" restrictions on foreigners trying to enter Czechoslovakia. These will probably last at least until next spring when the government may take another look at them because of tourism's importance as a source of hard currency.

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